

## RIG NETWORK

### Snapshots - Successful community garden projects

- School gardens
- Bush food gardens
- ‘Health sector’ food garden projects

#### SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

School based food gardens offer diverse benefits to students, teachers and the broader community and are a key way of engaging young people in learning for life about health, nutrition, the environment and broader life skills.

School gardens can provide a ‘living’ class room – a class room that can help produce food, be incorporated into various curricula program areas and offer experiential learning to students who may otherwise not readily engage in the class room environment. School gardens can help improve school participation rates and can lend themselves to innovative forms of parent and community involvement and volunteering. They offer a key starting point from which to build community communications about specific health and nutrition issues, and they can link well with programs to build healthy relationships (such as bush tucker gardens linking Elders and younger people).

Schools in remote Indigenous communities face specific challenges, and the right garden approach for your school community will need to be developed in consultation with them.

*Innovative school garden projects and models that you might like to consider:*

#### The EON Foundation – Western Australia

“EON introduced its **EON Edible Garden concept** in 2007 as a way to ensure that the education and awareness of a nutritious diet in a happy and healthy life, and the prevention of terrible diseases including Type II diabetes, was not impeded by the lack of access to affordable fruit and vegetables in remote communities. EON Edible Gardens complement its partnership with the Unity of First People of Australia’s Diabetes Management and Care Program and other “wellness” programs in remote communities. To ensure that the children in these communities had access to free fresh fruit and vegetables, it decided to pilot its first EON Edible Garden at the Djarindjin/Lombadina Catholic School in the Kimberley, where it had a long-standing relationship with the school and community.

Successful pilot projects, have led to the introduction of EON Edible Gardens in other communities, with significant expansion planned over coming years”. (EON website.)

#### Gunawirra’s Eingana Garden Project – New South Wales

This is a health and play program enhancing the well being of preschool children across some 30 pre-schools in NSW that have a large number of Indigenous students. The program promotes links between the preschool centre and the greater community and provides professional mentoring and support to pre-school staff and students with a strong focus on building relationships and providing professional counselling and emotional support. **Each community designs, builds and tends a garden with traditional bush tucker and a vegetable patch.** Parents of the pre-school children,

along with other community members, are regularly invited into the school and to participate in the garden. Lessons on good nutrition and health are woven in with community days that involve Aboriginal elders telling stories and leading play activities. In addition, children are given a plant to take and care for at home.

### Isolated small school garden projects

RIG Network has identified a number of innovative school garden projects that are making a difference in their communities. Some projects are modeled around after school activities, others are more fully integrated into the everyday curricula and link up with local health programs and community volunteering activities.

For example, the **Wangkatjunga Remote Community School near Fitzroy Crossing** is one success story that has a lot of potential to be built upon.

“All the children love the garden – and especially our rule ‘if you grow it, you eat it!’” says teacher Peter Crawford.

Wangkatjunga is a small community of some 100-250 people, where all students from kindergarten to year 12 are involved in the local school garden that got underway in 2007. The garden has triggered a lot of community interest, and Peter and a team of older students have built upon this interest to help a number of people establish home gardens and small community gardens on nearby land. “High school students like going into the community to plant gardens, as they are seen by their people as doing good work for their community, and this builds students self respect and their desire to do more good things for the community”.

According to Peter, now that some household gardens have got underway, there is very strong interest from other community members who also want a garden at home.

### Strategic school garden programs

RIG Network is familiar with a number of strategic school garden programs, whose experiences and different cultural contexts might be useful to consider, and adapt for schools in remote communities. Links to a number of them are on our website.

The **Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation** is well known in Australia and has been successful in urban contexts. The program requires schools to set up kitchens and a garden and conduct classes using produce to learn about food and healthy eating. In rural areas small schools ‘cluster’ to share a kitchen learning facility.

**KidsGrow** School Garden information resource kits are available from the Nursery & Garden Industry Association of Australia. KidsGrow offers four different themed garden approaches as possible models: Munch and Crunch Garden; Waterwise Sensory Maze; Australian Habitat Haven; and Seasonal Colour Gardens.

The South African **EduPlant Permaculture Schools Program, Food and Trees for Africa**, is a highly successful school food garden program that supports and mentors teachers, schools and communities to establish food gardens in disadvantaged communities. It’s a great model that’s built around an annual permaculture school garden competition that culminates in an awards weekend with lots of song, dance and cultural presentations. Permaculture approaches are low cost, and build capacity over

time – great practical resources are available on the FTFA website (see link from RIG website).

## **BUSH FOOD GARDENS**

The health and nutrition benefits of traditional bush foods, such as gubinge, are well documented.

There is very strong interest by communities in bush foods, and in bush food gardens and nurseries. There is a considerable amount of information about initiatives that are underway in these areas. See the RIG Network website for links to some key resources and programs in this area that include work by Greening Australia, NAILSMA and the CRC for Desert Knowledge.

Bush food gardens have great potential to involve local people and they offer a culturally inclusive way to talk about and develop local food garden initiatives that can link positively with local health and nutrition programs, school gardens, household gardens and community landscaping and enhancement programs.

Bush food plants lend themselves well to be used in ‘gardens’, street and public space plantings, healing gardens and in household yards and other areas. They can often work well with Landcare, Caring for Country, and other environmental initiatives that tend to focus on (and fund!) native species. Landcare programs have often used the message ‘caring for self, community and country’ – one self, your yard, the broader environment.

Bush food plant knowledge and expertise will often be best found ‘in’ your community, in the wisdom and experience of local Elders who may help develop and lead bush food garden initiatives if they are interested. Cultural knowledge and rights about the use of particular bush food plants needs to be dealt with respectfully and appropriately.

Bush food plants and gardens can be incorporated into local food garden and nutrition programs in lots of ways.

### **Some great examples we have come across include:**

- Local Elders who ‘know’ and have cultural access to knowledge take responsibility for bush food plant selection, propagation and local nursery to support other gardens
- Community cook ups that use meat from hunting, bush plants and ‘veggie’ gardens, to demonstrate how different ingredients can be used together to make meat go further.
- Healing gardens and trails in public areas, that involve young and older people in design and plantings
- Landscaping using resilient bush food plants – where there are fences (use bush food creepers); use fruit bearing trees for shade at schools, clinics and other public places
- Inclusion of bush food plants along with other ‘fruit and veggies’ in ‘showcase’ demonstration garden plots, centrally located, that people can see and obtain plants for their own household gardens

## INNOVATIVE 'HEALTH SECTOR' FOOD GARDEN PROJECTS

Over the years, Commonwealth, State and Territory Departments have provided some support to health and nutrition programs that have included food garden strategies. Perhaps the most well known program was the Building Healthy Communities in Remote Australia Initiative 2005-2008. The online Australian Indigenous Health *InfoNet* lists various health projects, and some projects include food garden components. Perhaps you know of projects and models that you think have worked well? If so, we'd love to hear about them. Here are some examples of some great 'linked up' health, nutrition and food garden initiatives that you and your community might find interesting.

### **Onslow Community Garden: The Pilbara Health Network, Western Australia**

The Onslow Community Garden is a very good example of a community health driven garden that aims to link with other programs, and is actively supported by local Indigenous leaders. The garden is associated with the Leaping Lizards program and is a member of the Pilbara Health Network. In addition to being a bush foods and fruit and vegetable garden, the garden is being landscaped and built as an attractive community centre for local people to visit, sit in, and enjoy. It will progressively link with a broader range of allied health services.

The Onslow Community Garden is situated next door to the school garden in the centre of town. Intensive workshops and the formation of a community steering group found that by having the two gardens side by side a safe environment is created for the elderly to gather, to do their crafts, and to be able to watch the children in the garden.

The local high school, TAFE and CDEP program are helping to build soft and hard landscaping garden features. The garden produces fruit and veggies, along with bush foods and healing plants. The Buuabaliji Thalayji Aboriginal Corporation are key stakeholders in the garden and are in charge of plant selection, seed collection and propagation of local indigenous species. They plan to establish a plant nursery on an adjoining site.

Regular nutrition based community events (such as cook ups) and presentations about associated dietary issues are held at the garden. The project reports good community feedback to these events, and notes very strong interest in anything to do with Diabetes education. The garden has been identified as a key safe environment for people who may need access to health specialists but may not feel comfortable in traditional medical environments - particularly those seeking help in relation to mental health, suicide prevention and drug and alcohol abuse. Visiting health professionals are able to hold information sessions at the garden and community members know they can seek information at these sessions in an unthreatening environment. Going forward the project will focus on families and education and use the community garden in conjunction with a model from the Pilbara Health Network that offers strategies to support self monitoring, evaluation and maintenance of chronic and minor health issues.

The garden provides a social, convivial environment in which the above sorts of objectives can be pursued, and is a place from which people can become further involved in work or volunteering in the garden and plant nursery.

## **The Fred Hollows Foundation - Great local Cookbook and a food gardens ‘mentor’.**

### ***Food for Better Health program – Roper Gulf Shire/Fred Hollows Foundation***

A joint venture to fund and enable the appointment of a Regional Coordinator Horticulture and Landcare in the Roper Gulf Shire, NT. The Coordinator provides direct support to garden initiatives in the Shire as part of the joint venture ‘Food for Better Health Program’.

The joint venture is an initiative of the Roper Gulf Shire Council, the Fred Hollows Foundation and other stakeholders in the area. The Coordinator works to facilitate and support a range of landcare and horticulture projects in the Shire’s remote communities. The Food for Better Health project aims to help establish a more accessible supply of nutritional fruit and vegetables by providing community members with a range of skills and resources – from the training they need to establish and care for their own gardens, though to more detailed training for work in a range of horticultural industries. Other activities undertaken by the Coordinator include plantings for dust suppression for eye health, weed management and feral animal control..

The project highlights the importance of local partnerships, and the practical contributions that a locally based food garden facilitator or mentor can make to assist local communities to grow their own food.

### ***Kukubat gudwan daga ‘Really cooking good food’- a cookbook developed by the community for the community***

“Throughout 2008 and 2009 the Women’s Development Coordinator with The Fred Hollows Foundation Indigenous Program, worked with three women’s centres in the Katherine region that operate community based nutrition programs. The women’s centres in Gulin Gulin, Wugularr and Manyallaluk were engaged and consulted at all stages of the community initiative to develop a region specific cookbook. The overall goal of the cook book project is to support the women’s centres to increase capacity and develop skills that will enable them to provide healthy nutritious food for their communities. The cook book meets the self identified needs of the women’s centres by catering for bulk aged care and school lunch program needs. This project has supported the communities to increase their level of capacity through improved literacy and numeracy skills and increase nutrition and food safety knowledge and practical skills. This process utilised a participatory planning model that allowed the women’s centres to have genuine control and ownership over the decisions made in regards to the recipes utilised in the cook book and the major production areas....The project has produced a relevant and practical cookbook that will contribute overall to strengthening the women’s control over the day to day management of their women’s centres”.

*Excerpt from the Executive Summary of the Kukubat gudwan daga, Project Report October 2009, Fred Hollows Foundation.*

This project highlights the importance of culturally appropriate information tools and resources to empower local people to address health and nutrition needs. It is sometimes found that people may not know how to prepare and consume produce from food gardens. Each of the women’s centres either have or are planning food gardens.

A local cookbook linked to local produce can help to bridge knowledge gaps and encourage the consumption of locally grown food.